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# BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

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Extract from Speech  
ON  
LEAGUE OF NATIONS

BY

HON. JOSEPH IRWIN FRANCE  
OF MARYLAND

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SPEECH  
OF  
HON. JOSEPH IRWIN FRANCE.

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BRITISH RULE IN INDIA.

Mr. FRANCE. Sirs, do you feel justified in the ratification of a treaty under which this Republic guarantees to perpetuate the rule of the British aristocracy in India, a rule out of harmony with all of the best traditions of the English people, one characterized by a ruthless exploitation which has received for generations the condemnation of the liberal statesmen of England?

You can not convince the American people that the rule of Britain in India has been benevolent. The American youth of several generations have learned at their mothers' knees, in their churches, and at their schools the tragic story of India's poverty and agony as she lies helpless and prostrate in error's chains. They have seen the ghastly pictures of those weak, emaciated, poverty-stricken Hindus, human specters, living skeletons, 50,000,000 of whom suffer the unceasing torture of hunger gnawing at their vitals as they live ever in the deep gloom of ignorance and sorrow and under the ever-haunting shadow of death by slow starvation. They have heard the tragic, awful history of her cholera, plagues, and famines, and have given generously for her relief. India, one of the earliest homes of our Aryan race, was in some respects the greatest of all the empires. Her civilization reaches back beyond the dawn of history. Three thousand years before the Christian era she carried on an extended commerce with mighty Babylon. Two thousand years before Christ the Egyptian monarchs wore her exquisitely woven fabrics and used her fine muslins for the winding sheets of their sacred dead. Six centuries before our era on the banks of the Indus our Aryan ancestors



had builded a civilization, with customs, arts, architecture, and literature of peculiar dignity and beauty. They worked with marvelous skill in iron, copper, brass, and the precious metals. In their sculpture they emulated and approached the matchless purity and beauty of the Grecian marbles. In their philosophy they surpassed the Egyptians and anticipated the Greeks. The Brahman priests of India advanced the astronomy of China and Egypt. Her science, agriculture, and industry flourished through wonderful centuries and she grew in wealth and power, her fabulous riches at last making her the treasure house of the world. In the fifteenth century the tales of her marvelous resources became known to the western peoples. The Portuguese came, then the Dutch and the French, but after the Battle of Plassy, in 1757, England's supremacy was established and she assumed responsibility for India's destiny. Judged by the ancient standards, Britain's rule might find something to commend it, but measured by the best traditions and ideals of the English people, no man can successfully defend it. India was rich. The British exploitation, which has exalted and enriched England, has stricken India down into the depths of desperate poverty.

#### INDIA'S POVERTY.

Edmund Burke said, in 1783:

There is nothing before the eyes of the natives [of India] but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with their appetites continually renewing for food that is continually wasting.

The Rev. Abbe J. A. Dubois—1820—English missionary of Mysore, said:

Alas, it is not Bibles the poor Hindus want or ask for; it is food and raiment. When the belly is empty and the back bare, the best disposed, even among the Christians, feel themselves but very little inclined to peruse the Bible.

Sir W. W. Hunter—1880—said:

There remain 40,000,000 of people who go through life on insufficient food.

Sir Charles Elliot—1888—chief commissioner of Assam, said:

Half the agricultural population do not know from one year's end to another what it is to have a full meal.

Sir William Digby—1900—in Prosperous British India, states:

In 1900 the agricultural population increased by 60,000,000. If the same income remains in 1900 as in 188—, it follows that 40,000,000 (according to Sir W. W. Hunter) plus 50,000,000 make 90,000,000, who are continuously hungry in British India at the beginning of the twentieth century.

R. C. Dutt—1902—an English authority, states:

The extreme poverty of the people is becoming patent every day. \* \* \* It is estimated from official records that one-fifth of the Indian rural population, or between forty or fifty million people, are insufficiently fed, even in years of good harvest. \* \* \* India alone sends us a tragic tale of poverty, famine, and death.

Rev. J. T. Sunderland—1905—American missionary in India, states:

The poverty of India is something you can have little conception of. \* \* \* The extreme, abject, the awful poverty of the people.

Hon. Samuel Edwin Montagu, state secretary for India in 1917, stated:

But it (India) is still a country of poverty. The majority of the people live on a few rupees a month, and it takes three rupees to make an American dollar. Their country has vast resources awaiting development, but the people are still very poor.

R. C. Dutt, in his Economic History of India, 1900, states:

The appalling poverty and joylessness of his life under such conditions can not be easily pictured. His hut is seldom rethatched and affords little shelter from cold and rain; his wife is clothed in rags; his little children go without clothing. Of furniture he has none; an old blanket is quite a luxury in the cold weather, and if his children can tend cattle or his wife can do home work to eke out his income he considers himself happy. It is literally a fact and not a figure of speech that agricultural laborers and their families in India generally suffer from insufficient food from year's end to year's end.

Mrs. Annie Besant, June, 1919, in the London Daily Herald, states:

About half the people of India get only one meal a day and that is not a sufficient meal. The average life of an individual is only 23 years; in England it is 40 years and in New Zealand 60 years. The real danger is a hunger revolution.

Sir Frederick Treves, 1904, then the most distinguished surgeon in England, stated, after a visit to India:

Possibly the first impression of India which succeeds the realization of the strangeness of all things is an impression of teeming life—of the unwanted numbers of living beings, human and animal, who crowd the land. The country would seem to be overrun by a multitude of



men, women, and children, all of about the same degree, a little below the most meager comfort and a little above the nearest reach of starvation. These are some of the great hordes who provide in their lean bodies victims for the yearly sacrifice to cholera, famine, and plague. Plague will slay 20,000 in a week, cholera ten times that number in a year, and the famine of one well-remembered time accounted for five and a quarter millions of dead people.

The extreme poverty of India is indicated by the following figures giving the comparative per capita wealth and income for several of the countries:

*Comparative table.*

	National wealth per capita.	National income per capita.
United States.....	\$2,154.00	\$372.00
Great Britain.....	1,913.00	232.00
France.....	1,238.00	182.00
Germany.....	1,512.00	156.00
Austria-Hungary.....	1,121.00	112.00
Italy.....	555.00	111.00
India.....	70.00	9.75

These figures are compiled from the *World Almanac*.

There is abundant evidence in the testimony of Englishmen that poverty in India has been for years increasing. S. S. Thorburn, financial commissioner of the Punjab, said that "seventy millions of Indians are in such a condition of hopeless poverty that nothing can relieve them." This poverty has been brought about by the vast and continuous drain by England on India's resources. After the battle of Plassy this drain began. Brooks Adams, in his "Law of Civilization and Decay," page 305, states:

The savings of millions of human beings for centuries, the English seized and took to London, as the Romans had taken the spoils of Greece and Pontus to Italy. What the value of the treasure was no man can estimate, but it must have been many millions of pounds—a vast sum in proportion to the stock of precious metals then owned in Europe.

This plunder and exploitation has continued in various forms. F. J. Shore, a retired Bengal administrator, states:

The fundamental principle of the English has been to make the whole Indian nation subservient, in every possible way, to the interests and benefits of themselves. They have taxed to the utmost limit; every successive Province, as it has fallen into our possession, has been made a field for higher exaction, and it has always been our boast how

greatly we have raised the revenue above that which the native rulers were able to extort. The Indians have been excluded from every honor, dignity, or office which the lowest Englishman could be prevailed on to accept.

A. J. Wilson, in *The Fortnightly Review*, March, 1884, states:

In one form or another, we draw fully thirty millions of pounds a year from that unhappy country (India), and then the average wage of the natives is about £2 per annum, less, rather than more, in many parts. Our Indian tribute, therefore, represents the entire earnings of upward of six million heads of families, say of thirty millions of people. It means the abstraction of more than one-tenth of the entire sustenance of India every year.

Mr. NORRIS. Mr. President, may I interrupt the Senator?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LENROOT in the chair). Does the Senator from Maryland yield to the Senator from Nebraska?

Mr. FRANCE. I do.

Mr. NORRIS. I should like to inquire from whom the Senator is reading?

Mr. FRANCE. A. J. Wilson, an Englishman, in the *Fortnightly Review*. These are nearly all extracts from the writings of Englishmen. I have not quoted anything from the writings of any other than the English, except in one instance, where I quote from J. T. Sunderland, an American ex-missionary, a profound and sympathetic student of Indian affairs. I have purposely not chosen any criticisms which were not written by Englishmen themselves.

This statement would seem to be almost incredible but for the supporting evidence we find on every hand of the continual drain on India by England in the form of interest, of official salaries, and of land taxation. In his work on "Famines in India," page 17, R. C. Dutt, also an Englishman, shows clearly that "the intensity and frequency of recent famines are greatly due to the resourceless condition and chronic poverty of the cultivators, caused by the overassessment of the soil on which they depend for a living."

In this work Mr. Dutt pleads for tax reforms and asks that the tax "rate may not exceed one-fifth of the gross produce of the soil in any case"—preface 15—and states, "the principle was adopted in the settlement of the central Provinces that



one-half the net product of the soil should be paid." "Virtually, therefore, the rent fixed was one-third of the gross produce," and cesses for improvements are levied in addition to this.

Keir Hardie stated:

The amount of taxes raised direct from the peasant is from 50 per cent to 75 per cent of the value of the yield of the land, in addition to which they have to pay local cesses, and various other small items, so that probably not less than 75 per cent of the harvest goes in taxes. \* \* \* It is this fact which keeps the people of India in a condition of hopeless grinding poverty.

The burden of such taxation can be better understood when we recall that the Indian income is about \$10 per capita per year, and that even very light taxes must oppress those who are so poor.

Of course, the people have the poorest and scantiest of clothing and the utmost insufficiency of fare. Quoting from another Englishman: "It is unusual to find a village woman who has any wraps at all. Most of them have to pass the night as best they can in their day clothes, a petticoat, wrapper, and bodice. As a rule they and their children sleep, in the cold weather, during the warm afternoons and in the early hours of the night."

The people can exist, if existence it can be called, on almost nothing. "The most instructive fact brought out by inquiries into the condition of five families of the laborer class was the extraordinary cheapness of a bare subsistence. A Baiga basket maker, whose family consisted of his wife and two small children, made on an average 12 baskets a week, which he sold for 2 pounds of unhusked rice or millet each. His monthly earnings were thus about 100 pounds of unhusked rice, worth rather less than a rupee. The family not only managed to live on this, supplemented with jungle fruits and roots, but saved annually about a rupee's worth of grain, wherewith they purchased the scanty clothing which sufficed for them." This should be, as it probably is, the world's record in cheap living. The average works out thus:

Total earnings in food per annum-----	8.
Less saving for clothing-----	16
Leaving for food-----	1
	15

This was to be divided among four persons. (Digby "Prosperous British India," p. 499.)

A native peasant of India is fortunate to have for a meal one handful of rice once a day. Truly, it is a land of hunger. Hardie said:

The real rat plague in India is poverty, and the flea which spreads the disease is the Government. The emaciated, bloodless bodies of the ryot



has not plague-resisting powers, and so the fell disease finds him an easy victim.

The Rev. J. T. Sunderland, formerly missionary from America, a deep and sympathetic student of India, in the *New England Magazine*, September, 1900, said:

The fact that at the end of 200 years of commercial dominance, and more than 40 years of absolute political sway, we are confronted with such indescribable poverty of the people, and with famine after famine of such magnitude and severity as to make the world stand aghast, seems to prove beyond answer that England \* \* \* has not made the welfare of India the first aim, but has subordinated India's good to her own enrichment. We have the hideous business that Rome and Spain were engaged in so long, and for which in the end they paid so dear. Called by its right name: What is the treatment of India by England? It is national parasitism; it is the stronger nation sacking the blood of the weaker. It is imperialism.

The deaths from famine, from 1854 to 1901, are estimated at 28,825,000, and during the last 10 years of that period the average was 1,000,000 deaths each year, or on the average, as has been calculated—

Two British subjects passed away from starvation or starvation induced diseases every minute of every day and every night from January 1, 1899, to September 30, 1901. (Digby, "Prosperous British India," page 130.)

The people live in miserable, dark, unventilated huts, with thatched roofs often out of repair, and Johns Scurr, in the *London Herald*, of May 4, 1919, describing the living conditions of the millhand, said:

The vast masses of the millhands are housed under the most indescribable, filthy conditions, and one is not surprised to learn that the people die of famines, plague, and cholera like fleas.

One of the further causes of this poverty, in addition to the drain by official salaries, interest and high taxation, has been the virtual destruction by discriminatory tariffs against India and in favor of England, designed to exclude Indian fabrics from the English and European markets, of the cotton-weaving industry of India. Owing to the unjust and oppressive tariffs the distaffs of India disappeared before the power looms of Manchester. The manufacturers of England cruelly crushed out their helpless Indian competitors.

#### ILLITERACY.

Propose this test to any colonial policy. Does it seek to educate the colonial peoples? If it does, its aim is elevation and

liberation. If it does not, it is directed to that heartless exploitation which ends in the degradation of the native people. By this test England has failed. India had an educational system. The English destroyed it. The sums spent by England for education in India are pitifully small, \$0.015 per annum per capita, as against the \$4 per capita which we have expended in the Philippines. Only 6,780,721 out of about 75,000,000 children in India attend school, and the illiteracy among these people, who are of the very highest intellectual capacity, is 93 per cent, whereas during our 20 years of rule in the Philippines we have reduced the illiteracy there to 56 per cent. Seven per cent of the Hindus of the Aryan race, after 140 years of British rule, are literate, as against 44 per cent of the Filipinos after 20 years of our rule there. England's national policy, for so long dictated by a reactionary aristocracy, has never been favorable to the education of the masses at home, and it has opposed comprehensive plans for the education of the colonial people. Against this reactionary policy the liberals of England have for years protested. With reference to colonial peoples the British ruling class has said:

We do not want generals, statesmen, and legislators; we want industrious husbandmen.

In July of 1833, during a memorable debate upon the question of education in India, particularly with reference to the education of Hindus for public office, Lord Ellenborough said:

We had won the Empire of India by the sword, and we must preserve it by the same means, doing at the same time everything that is consistent with our existence there for the good of the people.

On July 10, 1833, Macaulay, speaking in opposition to Lord Ellenborough and in favor of the bill, which was to prevent the exclusion of Hindus from office in India, enunciated in a few great, burning, and immortal sentences the principles upon which a sound and upbuilding colonial policy should be based:

We are told that the time can never come when the natives of India can be admitted to high civil and military office. We are told that this is the condition on which we hold our power. We are told that we are bound to confer on our subjects—every benefit which they are capable of enjoying? No. Which it is in our power to confer on them? No. But which we can confer on them without hazard to our own domination. Against that proposition I solemnly protest as inconsistent alike with

sound policy and sound morality. \* \* \* It is the most childish ambition to covet dominion which adds to no man's comfort or security. To the great trading nation, to the great manufacturing nation, no progress which any portion of the human race can make in knowledge, in taste for the conveniences of life, or in the wealth by which those conveniences are produced, can be a matter of indifference. It is scarcely possible to calculate the benefits which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilization among the vast population of the East. It would be on the most selfish view of the case, far better for us that the people of India were well governed and independent of us than ill governed and subject to us—that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broadcloth and working with our cutlery, than that they were performing their salaams to English collectors and English magistrates, but were too ignorant to value or too poor to buy English manufactures. To trade with civilized men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages. That would indeed be a doting wisdom which, in order that India might remain a dependency, would keep it a useless and costly dependency, which would keep a hundred millions of men from being our customers in order that they might continue to be our slaves. It was, as Bernier tells us, the practice of the miserable tyrants whom he found in India, when they dreaded the capacity and spirit of some distinguished subject, and yet could not venture to murder him, to administer to him a daily dose of the pousta, a preparation of opium, the effect of which was in a few months to destroy all the bodily and mental powers of the wretch who was drugged with it, and to turn him into a helpless idiot. That detestable artifice, more horrible than assassination itself, was worthy of those who employed it. It is no model for the English nation. We shall never consent to administer the pousta to a whole community, to stupefy and paralyze a great people whom God has committed to our charge for the wretched purpose of rendering them more amenable to our control. What is that power worth which is founded on vice, on ignorance, on misery, which we can hold only by violating the most sacred duties, which as governors we owe to the governed, which as a people blessed with far more than an ordinary measure of political liberty and of intellectual light, we owe to a race debased by 3,000 years of despotism and priestcraft? We are free, we are civilized to little purpose if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilization.

Are we to keep the people of India ignorant in order that we may keep them submissive, or do we think that we can give them knowledge without awakening ambition, or do we mean to awaken ambition and to provide it with no legitimate vent? Who will answer any of these questions in the affirmative? Yet, one of them must be answered in the affirmative by every person who maintains that we ought permanently to exclude the natives from high office. I have no fears. The path of duty is plain before us, and it is also the path of wisdom, of national prosperity, of national honor.

The destinies of our Indian Empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions.



Whether such a day will ever come I know not, but never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own. The scepter may pass away from us. Unforeseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms, but there are triumphs which are followed by no reverses. There is an empire exempt from all national causes of decay. These triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our law. (Vol. 19 (3d ser.), p. 536.)

What a great colonial policy is outlined in these most eloquent words. Would that England might have followed the vision of that imperishable empire declared by this gifted and devoted champion of the oppressed. But it was not to be. Bourbonism never yields. It must be broken, crushed beneath the tires of time and progress. Great Englishmen have seen the vision, but the iron clutch of the reactionaries could not be loosed.

And so, at the conclusion of this war, when the millions of India, whose sons had fought for England and for us on the strength of our promises of self-determination and freedom for all peoples, demanded that right of self-determination, the infamous Rowlatt act was passed, making the discussion of those demands a crime punishable with penalties of utmost severity. And then occurred one of the most impressive spectacles of our generation. Millions of the people of India, on a given day, without respect to the creeds which had divided them, forsook their tasks and went into each other's temples and mosques to pray for liberation. Unarmed, they undertook a passive resistance. They threw themselves before moving cars and were killed as a protest against their slavery. Yet these unarmed, helpless, protesting people were ruthlessly mowed down by the British machine guns and slaughtered by bombs from the air. Thus did England answer their plea for the self-determination which she and we had promised would be the fruit of this war. And at this very moment, I am informed, Indian troops are being used to crush that same plea for the fulfillment of our promises in Egypt and in Ireland, the sons of a poor and crushed people being employed to keep other oppressed peoples in subjection.

The yellow grain comes only from the flail and purified gold only from the fire. England needed to be chastened, and she has now passed through the furnaces of trial and agony.

Her reactionary representatives and colonial administrators at Paris tried to play the old diplomacy and wrote this despicable document; but, sirs, retribution, slow-footed, but inevitable, has overtaken them. At last the fires of liberty which Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Lincoln kindled here upon this Western Continent have illuminated the world and are consuming the old order. They have now warmed the hearts and are now shining in the faces of the 20,000,000 of members of this great new liberal party in England, who in the increasing light have themselves seen and have sworn to achieve what our common ancestors foresaw.

England has failed in India, failed in Egypt, failed in all of Africa, because of the successful resistance by her reactionary leaders of this great colonial policy which has been urged by Macaulay and a long line of illustrious English liberals, and which now, under the liberal leadership which has been all but established in England as a result of the war, will become her permanent national policy. But in spite of what we hope from that liberal leadership in England, and however much we may desire to cooperate with it, we can not justify ourselves in signing and sealing an international contract which gives and guarantees to England nearly 931,000 additional square miles, a territory in area of approximately one-third of the United States, in Africa, and places in her charge more than 11,000,000 additional helpless African natives, in view of her past policy in the Dark Continent, which policy has been characterized by heartless exploitation, with practically no attempt to benevolently and intelligently elevate the peoples there.







